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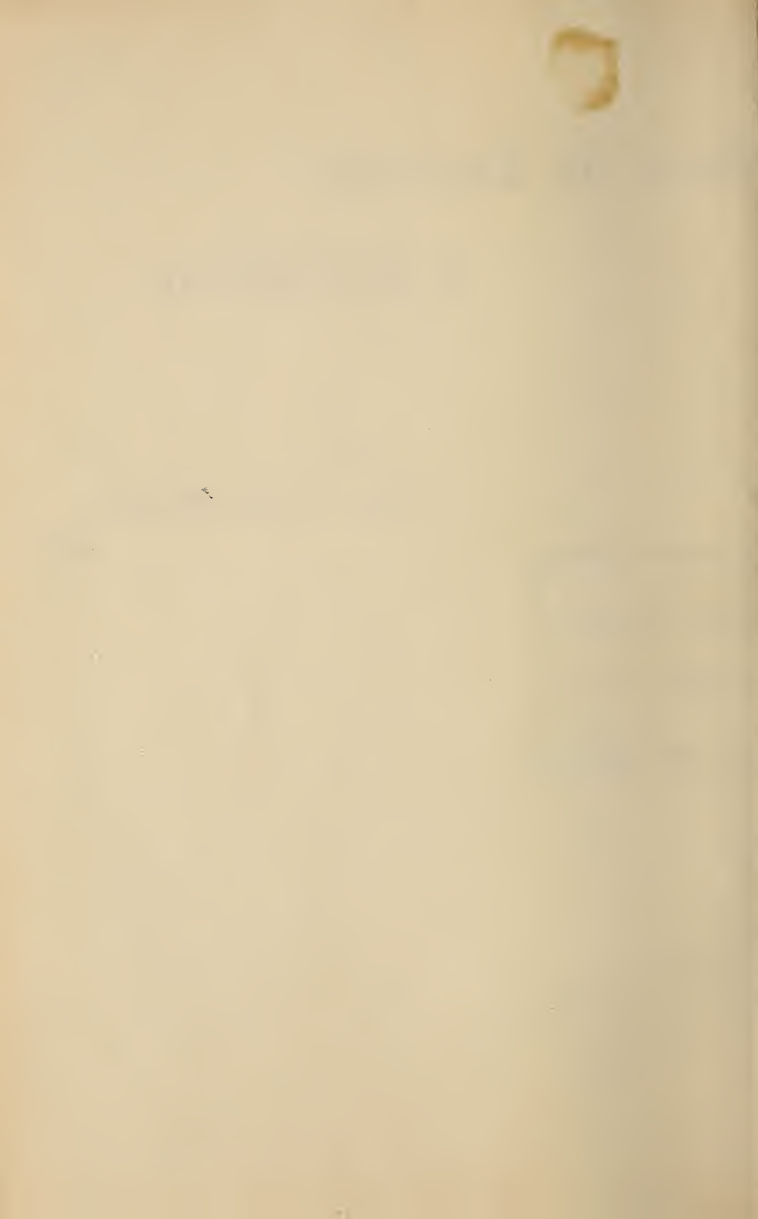
How to Become
a Christian.

By

REV. LYMAN ABBOTT,
D.D.

Five Simple
Talks
To the Young

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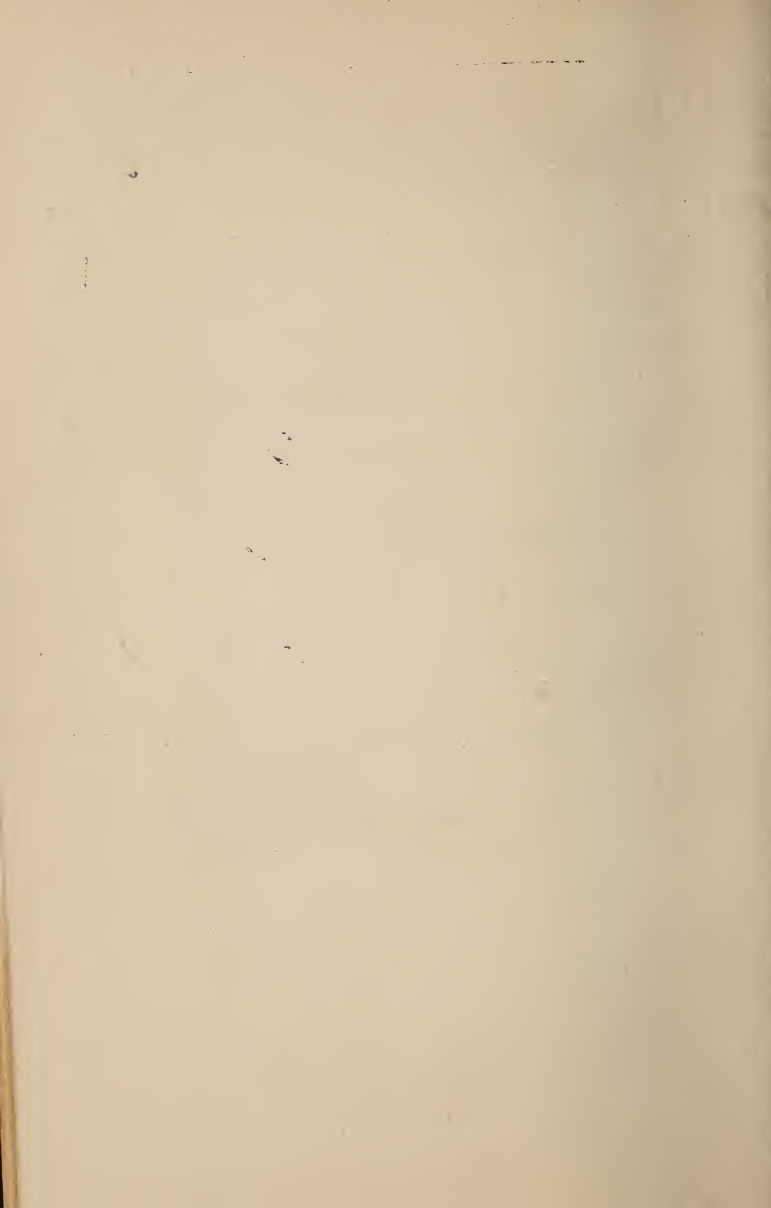
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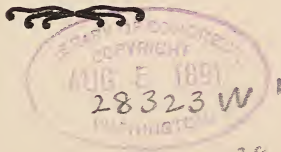


HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN.

Five Simple Talks to the Young.

BY THE
REV. LYMAN ABBOTT, D. D.

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HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN.

I. Disciples.

A PICTURE rises before me, as I write, of a little boy in a country church, in . . . the high, straight-backed pew, his legs . . . dangling uncomfortably, unable to reach the floor. He had a vague sense that he was a sinner, though he could not have told of anything very wrong that he had done. He felt that he ought to be a Christian, but he neither knew what a Christian was nor how to become one. He occasionally heard a creed read in church which seemed to him rather long, and quite impossible for him to understand, and he supposed that he must understand it and believe it before he could be a Christian. He used to look at the gray-haired saints about him, and think when he grew old enough he would be

a Christian, much as he used to look with admiration at the stage-driver who drove the four-horse stage past his grandfather's door, and think that when he was old enough he would drive a stage. He did not think it wicked not to be a stage-driver, but he did think it somehow wicked not to be a Christian, and it occasionally made him very unhappy. But to be a Christian while he was a little boy seemed to him just as impossible as to be a stage-driver while he was a little boy. So he waited until he was a senior in college before he joined the church, and he has always looked back with keen regret upon those eight or ten years during which he might have been a joyous Christian, and with a great desire to tell boys and girls, who are of a like mind, how very simple and how very joyous it is to be a Christian.

There are five words by which in the New Testament Christians are called. If you understand what these five mean you will understand what is a Christian, and how to become one. They are :

Disciples or Scholars.

Believers or the Faithful.

Followers or Soldiers.

Brethren or Members of the household.

Saints or the Holy.

A Christian is, first of all, a disciple—that is, a scholar. Christ has come into the world to teach something, and a Christian is one who has entered his school and is learning of him. You will sometimes hear people say that it does not make any difference what a man believes. But the very object of going to school is to believe something which you did not believe before. All learning consists in asking questions and getting information, in wondering or doubting, and then, as a result of the wondering or doubting, and of the consequent study, in learning to believe something which you never before believed. So a Christian is one who comes to Christ as to a school-teacher, to learn something which Christ has to teach him. If he thinks it does not make any difference what he believes, he will not go to school and he will not learn anything.

And it is coming to Christ to learn the things which Christ came to teach. He did not teach the sort of things you learn in school. He did not teach spelling, or history, or arithmetic, or geography, or natural science. And he did teach the things about which most boys and girls learn very little at school. He taught the answers to such

questions as these: What is it to be good? What is it to be bad? And what is the difference between the two? When we die, what happens? What becomes of us? The body is put in the grave. Is the boy or the man put into the grave? If not, what becomes of the boy or the man that loved and laughed and wept and was angry and was joyful? Where did this strange world come from? Where did I come from? Who made me? And what did he make me for? Can I know him. And talk with him? And will he hear what I have to say? And does he care about the things that I care about? And if I want to talk with him and get his advice or his help, how shall I do it? When I have done wrong and am unhappy, what can I do to get rid of the wrong and the unhappiness? If I want to control my temper or my vanity, if I want to be good and pure and true and brave, like my father or my mother, or some hero I have read about, what can I do to be what I want to be? These are the questions which Christ answered. And to be a Christian is to go to school to Christ, and listen to his answers, and try to learn what is the truth which he teaches us.

But—and this I want particularly to make

you see and believe—to be a scholar is not to know what Christ has taught, but to go to Christ in order to learn. There are a great many people who seem to imagine that you must believe a creed in order to become a Christian. Not at all! You become a Christian in order that you may learn the truth, and so believe a creed. You do not have to know geography in order to study it; you have to study it in order to know it. And you do not have to know and believe what Christ taught in order to be Christ's scholar; you have to be Christ's scholar in order to know and believe what Christ taught.

There was a jail in a Roman town in Paul's time in the charge of a cruel and ignorant Roman jailer. He knew nothing about the Bible, or Sunday, or Christ, or any life after death. He had never heard of so much as the Ten Commandments or the Lord's prayer. He did not even know that God was good and wished him to be good. He had beaten Paul and Silas cruelly, and then put them in a horrible underground dungeon, dark and wet and cold, and fastened their feet in cruel stocks. But their hearts were so light that they sang songs in the midnight, and the other prisoners were

listening to them, when suddenly an earthquake shook the prison and threw some of the walls down, so that the prisoners might have escaped. The terrified jailer would have killed himself. Perhaps he thought an angry God had come to take vengeance on him. Perhaps he merely feared that he would be tortured and put to death if his prisoners got away. Paul suspected what the jailer was about to do, and called out to him, Do thyself no harm, we are all here. And the jailer called for a light, and came down into the dungeon all trembling, and asked Paul and Silas, What must I do to be saved? And they said to him, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they took him and baptized him that same night into the Church of Christ. He did not know anything—a great deal less, certainly, than any reader of this book knows—about God, or heaven, or duty, or Christ, or love. But he wanted to learn; and wanting to learn of Christ was enough to make him Christ's scholar.

Do you want to learn what Christ has to teach? If you do, that is all that is necessary to become a disciple or scholar of Christ.

II. Believers.

CHRISTIANS are called in the New Testament disciples or scholars. That is, they are persons who go to Christ to learn what he has to teach. They are also called Believers, or the Faithful. What do these words mean?

First, they mean the same thing. The New Testament, you know, was originally written in Greek. Now the same Greek word is sometimes translated *belief* and sometimes *faith*; and the same Greek word is sometimes rendered *believer* and sometimes *faithful*. To believe in Christ is, then, the same as to have faith in Christ. I have told you that to be a disciple of Christ is not to believe all that Christ has taught, but to go to school in order that you may learn what he has taught. So now I want to make it clear to you that to believe in Christ is not the same thing as to believe something about Christ. The difference can best be made clear by a simple story.

Some years ago I was coming out of a restaurant in New York City with my wife. I stopped a moment at the desk to pay my bill while she turned toward the door. Suddenly I was startled by a child's cry of

distress: "Mamma! mamma!" I turned, but, quick as I was, my wife was quicker. She had sprung forward and caught the little lost child by the hand. And the little girl—not over four or five years old—was standing looking up into my wife's face; the tear had stopped in her eye, and the cry was hushed, and she was looking up with confidence and hope into the eyes which looked down so quietly and calmly into hers, and the little lost child somehow felt that she had been found and that all would be right. In a moment more the mother had missed her child and came hurrying back, and the little girl, crying again, but in a very different tone, "Mamma! mamma!" sprang from my wife's hands into her mother's arms, and both disappeared into the street.

Now, in this case the little girl knew nothing about my wife; she did not know her name, nor who she was, nor where she came from, nor anything about her. But there was something in the strong, kind face which looked down into hers, and in the firm grasp of the friendly hand that reassured her. She believed *in* the stranger, though she did not believe anything *about* the stranger. And because she believed in the stranger she was comforted and her ter-

ror was taken away. This is to believe in Christ. Not to think something about Christ, but to trust in him.

The disciples in the New Testament believed in Christ before they believed anything about Christ. He was walking along the street one day and he saw a tax-gatherer collecting taxes, and he said to him, Follow me, and Matthew closed up his business at once, and left it, and followed Christ. He did not know for a year afterwards that Christ was the Messiah; nor until three years after that Christ would die for the sins of the world and would rise again. He believed *in* Christ and followed him (as the little girl believed in my wife and trusted her) before he had learned anything about Christ's character, or what Christ had come into the world to do. If you will read carefully the scenes in the New Testament of Christ's cures of the blind, the deaf, the paralytics, you will see that in almost every case they knew very little about Christ or his plans. He was a stranger, but they believed *in* him because they saw that he was good and kind and just and true and wise.

To believe in Christ, then, is not to believe something about Christ; it is to—but what it is I can best illustrate by another story.

On the Atlantic coast are what are called life-saving stations. They are stations where are kept a lifeboat and a crew of men ready to go off through the surf whenever the storm drives a ship on shore. One dark night some years ago, the captain of a life-saving station was awakened by hearing the sound of a gun off the coast, and he knew that a ship was in distress. He hurried down to the shore with his comrades, and through the darkness and the storm—for it was an awful night—he could descry the faint outline of a ship. She had grounded on a sand bank some way out from the shore, and there she lay, while every moment the great waves broke over her. Sometimes in such cases men manage with a mortar—a kind of great gun—to shoot a rope from the shore out to the wreck. Then by means of this rope the men on ship pull a bigger rope after it, and so make a kind of rope bridge—"life-line" they call it—between the ship and the shore, on which they fasten a car in which the passengers can be pulled ashore. But the ship was too far from the shore for such a life-line. So the captain and his men got into the life boat, and launched it, pushing it out through the surf, and rowed out

through the waves and the darkness. With great difficulty they got the boat alongside the ship, and the captain climbed up by a rope and found himself on the ship's deck. Then he told the men on the ship where they were and what they were to do. They were on a sand bar, perhaps half a mile off shore. Beyond the bar was deep water, and beyond the deep water was the land, and men ready to rescue them." "If you stay here," he said, "your ship will be beaten to pieces by the violence of the waves. Slip your anchor chains, let the ship go; the tide is coming in; and the tide and the great waves will carry the ship over the sand bar into the deep water, and across the deep water to the mainland; when she once has run up on the beach there, we can all manage to get safe to shore." They did as he told them, and all the ship's crew and passengers were saved.

Now, in this case, the ship's crew believed in the captain who had come out to them. They did not know anything about him; but they believed *in* him because he had come out to them, and had risked his own life to save them. And so, when he told them where they were and what the coast was, they believed that he told them the

truth. You can imagine how, before he came, they might have discussed the question, one believing that the coast was a sandy beach, and another that it was rocky; one arguing that they had better slip their anchor chain and beach the ship, and another arguing that if they did the ship would be broken up and they would be drowned. But when the stranger came and told them where they were, and what sort of a coast it was, they believed that he was a true witness and told them the truth; and so their fears were taken away, and a new hope was put in them. And when he told them what to do they obeyed him. They treated him as the master or captain of the ship, followed his orders, and were saved.

Now, men have discussed a great deal about the mystery of life and the mystery of death: about what is the world beyond the grave, and how to get safely to the land of peace and light. And Christ comes into the world and says, "I have come from the land of peace and light, to show you how to get there safely; I have come from my Father and your Father; and if you will follow my directions, I will bring you safely through life and safely through death, to your Father's house and your house." To

believe in Christ is to believe that he is a true witness; that he knows what he is talking about when he talks about life and death and heaven and God; that he tells us, not what he has thought or guessed or reasoned out, but what he has seen and known; it is to trust in him because of the life he has lived and the death he has died and the love he has shown toward us, and so to have our fears lightened or taken away and a new hope given to us; and it is to obey his directions, and so to be saved by him.

To be a Disciple is to be a pupil in Christ's school.

To be a Believer is to trust in Christ, to believe what he says, and to obey his directions.

III followers.

CHRISTIANS are followers of Christ. What is it to be Christ's follower?

When I was a boy I used to play a game called "Follow your leader." We chose one of our number for a leader, who started on a run, picking out difficult places—over the fence, through the bushes, across the marsh, leaping the brook, up the cliff side; the rest followed. If he was daring and adventurous, the company grew less as the run

continued, and the smaller and the less enduring boys dropped off one by one. In this game we all followed a leader; what he did we attempted. During the Civil War General Sherman turned away from Chattanooga, and, leaving his supplies behind him, started on an ever-memorable march to the Atlantic Ocean. His soldiers followed him. But in this real and serious game of follow your leader, General Sherman did not always go at the head of the column. Probably he was generally nearer the center or even the rear. There were usually two or three columns, and yet, though the leader may have followed the army, the army followed their leader. They were inspired by his purpose, caught his spirit, endeavored to do his work, to go as he directed. They were as truly followers of General Sherman as, in the boyish game, we were followers of a leader.

But often, in this following of a leader, there is no march, no body of men, no literal leading. In the last presidential campaign, Mr. Cleveland was the leader of the Democratic party; and Mr. Harrison was the leader of the Republican party. In England Mr. Gladstone is the leader of the Liberal party. In this case the party follows its leader as truly as General Sherman's soldiers followed their

leader, or we boys our leader, but in a different way. They agree with him in his spirit, his purpose, his general plans. They want to accomplish the same things which he wants to accomplish. They look up to him as the one to direct their movements and determine the methods by which the work is to be done. Whenever a body of men or boys desire to accomplish anything together they have a leader, and they follow him. If there are a dozen men working on a road, one is a leader. If there are fifty men working in a factory, one is a leader; foreman they call him—that is, man at the fore or head or lead. If every man were to attempt to do the work in his own way, nothing would ever be done. Each man must be willing to give up his own way, and must work in his leader's way. A body of men without a leader is a mob; a body of men with a leader is an army. It is the leader that makes the difference.

Now, Jesus Christ came into the world to do certain work. In His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth He tells us what this work is.

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to

read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book he found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. . . . And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

This is what Christ came into the world for. To be a follower of Christ is to take up this work under his leadership, and attempt to carry it on in his spirit and according to his methods.

One day, a little after he had preached this sermon at Nazareth, he was at Capernaum. Capernaum was by the shore of a lake, and the people were crowding about to hear him. He saw some boats on the shore, and the fishermen cleaning their nets, and he asked one of the fishermen to lend him a boat. He pushed it a little off from the shore, while the people stood or sat on the beach which sloped down to the water's edge. He sat in the prow of the boat, as a kind of pulpit, and preached to them. And when he had preached the sermon he advised the fishermen to push out into the lake and let down

their nets again ; they did so, and caught a great quantity of fish. When they brought their fish to shore he said, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they forsook their boats and their fish and followed him. They became followers of Christ—that is, they caught his spirit, took up his work, and tried to carry it on in his methods. They did not always literally follow him. For, a little later, he sent them out two by two to preach the Gospel and heal the sick. While he went to the great towns they went to the villages. But they were doing the same sort of work, in the same way, with the same spirit.

To be a follower of Christ, then, is to have Christ's spirit ; to try to do Christ's work in Christ's way. It is to tell glad tidings to the poor, to comfort the broken-hearted, to teach the ignorant, to try to make other people about you happier, wiser, and better than they would be but for your presence. In Plymouth Church there is a Mission Band of boys and girls which meets once a week to do mission work. The girls sew ; the boys make screens and scrap-books for the hospitals. They are trying to do the same kind of work Christ did when he was here. They are following Christ. But one

does not need to wait for a mission band. The little girl who takes care of brother or sister in order to help mother, the boy who tries to be loyal in school and manly in play and fair everywhere, and never to bully smaller boys, or, if he can help it, allow smaller boys to be bullied, who tries to do what will be fair and just and kind and true, is following Christ. For this is the work Christ did, and left his followers to do after him.

The minister preaches on Sunday morning, and his congregation listens to his teaching; they are disciples. He visits them in their homes and they like to see him come, because they like him and believe that he is a good man and they would like to be like him. They are believers. Sunday afternoon he goes out to a schoolhouse to preach, and his people go, some to Sunday-school and some to hospitals and some return to their own homes, to teach men to be better or to make men happier. They are followers. Are you trying to do a little of Christ's work in Christ's way? Then you are a follower of Christ.

IV. Brethren.

CHRISTIANS are called brethren in the New Testament. What does this mean? What is it to be a brother to other Christians?

You know what it is to have a brother, and you love him just because he is your brother. Perhaps he is a great tease; but you love him notwithstanding his teasing. You would not stand the teasing from any one else; but you stand it from him because he is your brother. Or, if you are so unfortunate as not to have a brother you envy the other boys and girls who have one. You wish you had one. And when some playmate of yours scolds about her brother you think to yourself, if she had no brother for a few weeks she would be glad enough to get him back again, no matter if he is sometimes ugly and cross, or if he teases, or if he expects her to run his errands and do his chores for him. We love our brothers and sisters because they are ours; because they belong to us; because we have the same father and mother, and the same home, and the same great interests, and because we have lived together and do live together.

But there are individual interests that bind us together in what we sometimes call brotherhoods. Then there are individual interests that bind us together in what we call clubs. There are art clubs, and musical clubs, and lawyers' clubs, business men's clubs, and authors clubs, and politi-

cal clubs. There are various trade societies formed on a similar principle. The bankers, the brokers, the merchants, the lawyers, the plumbers, the carpenters, the doctors, the ministers, the miners, the 'longshoremen, all have their unions or societies, in which they meet and discuss their common concerns. Sometimes these unions or clubs are called "brotherhoods;" but, whether they are called so or not, they are all really brotherhoods.

Then there are still larger interests that unite us. We are citizens of the same city, the same State, the same country. We do not often think of this larger brotherhood unless something occurs to make us think of its value. You are traveling in France, and for a week or two you have met only Frenchmen, or perhaps Englishmen; one day in a hotel you happen on an American, and at once you fall into conversation. You find he came from the same State, lives in the same town, used to go to the same school you went to, belongs to the same political party, knows and loves some of your best friends; at each new discovery you have a greater interest in one another. You become at once something like brothers, because you have so much in common.

Now these illustrations may help you to see how it is that all Christians constitute one great brotherhood. They are all pupils in the same school, learning the same lesson, of the same Teacher. They all believe in the same Friend, and Saviour, love him above every one else in the world, revere and honor him above all others. They are all engaged under him in doing the same work, are followers of the same Leader, belong to the same army, are citizens of the same kingdom of God. It is true that they are divided up into different churches—that is, into different brotherhoods; but all these brotherhoods make one great brotherhood, somewhat as all the States make one great United States. The Nation is greater than the States which make the Nation; so the Church is greater than the churches which make the Church.

Every Christian ought to belong to this brotherhood. This does not mean that every Christian ought to belong to a church. If the churches did not require anything of those who wished to join them, except love for Christ and a desire to learn of him and do his work, then I think every one ought to join a church. But they nearly all of them require something more. If you were a

Protestant, and lived where there was nothing but a Roman Catholic church, you could not join it, because you would not believe that the Pope can make no mistake. On the other hand, there are many Congregational and Presbyterian churches which many of you could not join, because they would require you to say you believed a great many things that you are too young as yet to understand—I somewhat doubt if the older people understand them. It is never right to pretend to believe something we do not really believe. But it is not necessary to join a church in order to join the brotherhood. You join the brotherhood if you are really trying to learn what they are trying to learn, and to do what they are trying to do; if you believe in and love and revere the Master other Christians believe in and love and revere; and therefore want to do all the little you can to help them, and are willing to take all the help they can give you. I knew two boys once in a boarding-school, about eleven or twelve years old, one of whom was an Episcopalian and the other a Congregationalist. They roomed together, and every night they had prayers together, sometimes with the Prayer-Book and sometimes with-

out; and they used to talk with each other, and tell each other their temptations, and discuss together how to overcome them. They may have been a little morbid and sentimental sometimes—I rather think they were. But they were brethren, and belonged to the great Brotherhood, although one of them certainly did not join a church till four or five years later.

To belong to the brotherhood is to love every one who loves Christ because he loves Christ, and to want to help every one who is trying to do Christ's work because it is Christ's work. And that the smallest child can do.

V. Saints.

THE fifth word used in the New Testament to designate a Christian is Saints.

When I was a child I used to think that only aged persons could be saints. They must be gray-haired, and very solemn, and very wise and very pious, and very fond of praying, reading the Bible, and singing hymn tunes. And as I was merry, and fonder of other books than of the Bible, and of other songs than "Watts and Select," I thought it was quite impossible for me to be a saint. This was a mistake.

There are two words in our Bible, "saint" and "holy," which mean the same thing; they mean "given to God." One may not be wiser or better or older or more fond of the Bible or psalms and hymns than his companions; but if he is "given to God" he is a saint.

In Jerusalem, on two hills, separated by a deep ravine, were two magnificent buildings, one God's Temple, the other Solomon's Palace. Imagine that a goldsmith is employed to prepare two cups, one for the Temple and the other for the Palace. He gets a lump of gold and cuts it into two equal parts; he beats them both out on the anvil; fashions them both into the same shape; engraves the same vine on them both; and when they are finished they stand before him, two twin cups, made of the same material and of the same workmanship. One he sends to the Temple for God's service—it is a holy cup; the other he sends to the Palace for the king's use—it is a secular cup. The one is given to God, the other is not. There are two girls of the same age, going to the same school and the same church, sharing the same lessons, playing the same games. One has given herself to God, has resolved to do his work, obey his

will, and is trying to become like his well-beloved Son ; the other is living just to have a good time ; the first is a saint, the second is not. The first may have a quick temper ; may say every day something which she is sorry at night that she has said. The other may be naturally so amiable that she never speaks a sharp, cross, ugly word. But if the first has given herself to God, and is trying to control her temper, she is a saint ; and if the other is living without thought of or care for God, she is not a saint. To be a saint is not to be perfect ; it is to be given to God. The cup was a holy cup, even while the goldsmith was making it, if he was making it for God ; and the child is a saint, even while he is a-making, if he is trying to be God's child.

But there is one other thing to be said about the saint. If you give yourself to a friend and if your friend gives himself to you, you and your friend will gradually grow to be like one another. If you are very fond of a book, and read it over and over again, it will make you like itself. If a young man is constantly reading Carlyle, he will by and by come to use a style like Carlyle's. If he is a great admirer of some hero of history, like Cromwell or Franklin, and

reads and re-reads about him continually, he will grow to be a little like him. If his hero is a living hero, not a dead one, the influence will be greater. If he goes Sunday after Sunday to listen to some great preacher, like Mr. Spurgeon or Phillips Brooks, and loves and admires the preacher and wants to be like him, by and by he will come to think as the preacher thinks and feel as the preacher feels. And if he should not merely go to hear him, but should live with the preacher, work with the preacher, and day by day do what the preacher desired him to do, he would grow still more like him, and more rapidly like him. So, if we give ourselves to God, and God gives himself to us we gradually grow like God. To be a saint is not to be like God, it is to be given to God. But if we give ourselves to God, to love him, and serve him, and do his will, and be like him, little by little we shall grow like him. This is what Paul means when he says: "We all, reflecting as from a mirror the image of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." To be a saint is not to have this change finished; it is to be looking at the Lord Jesus Christ, and trying to reflect the Lord Jesus Christ to others, and so to be, little by lit-

tle. changing into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you see that the meaning of the word saint includes the meaning of all the other words. To be a saint is to be a disciple, learning what Jesus has to teach; and a believer, trusting in Jesus as a friend; and a follower, trying to do Jesus' work. It is not to have succeeded, it is to make the endeavor.

I have tried in these papers to explain to you what it is to be a Christian. Do you wish to be one? Are you ready to resolve that you will be one? If so, why not at once? Read over carefully the pledge on the next page; think what it means; talk it over with your father or mother; and then, if you are resolved to try to learn what Christ has to teach, to do Christ's work, to accept Christ as a friend and a helper and to welcome the help of all who are like-minded, cut out or copy this pledge and sign it. If you do so, I advise you to sign two copies; keep one for yourself, and give one to your father or mother

The pledge is as follows :



I Resolve by GOD'S Help to be :



A **Disciple**, seeking to learn what CHRIST has to teach ;

A **Believer**, trusting in CHRIST as my FRIEND, my HELPER, and my SAVIOUR ;

A **Follower**, trying to do CHRIST'S work in CHRIST'S way ;

And in this endeavor I will welcome the help of all who have the same purpose.

Name, _____

Date, _____





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